

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BANGKO 03459 01 OF 02 141444Z
ACTION EA-06

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R 141030Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9231
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 3459

STADIS//////////

LIMDIS

FOR EA ONLY

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR US XB
SUBJECT: US POLICY ON SOUTHEAST ASIA IN POST-VIETNAM PERIOD

REF: STATE 025347

1. NEARLY TWO YEARS AFTER THE FALL OF PHNOM PENH
AND SAIGON AND THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN LAOS, THE
SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA APPEARS FROM BANGKOK TO BE
MORE SATISFACTORY TO US INTERESTS THAN MANY PESSIMISTS
THEN BELIEVED LIKELY. NEVERTHELESS, I TAKE A LESS
CONFIDENT VIEW OF THE FUTURE STABILITY OF THE REGION

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THAN MY COLLEAGUES WHO ARE FURTHER REMOVED FROM THE
STRIDENT POLEMICS AND CONSTANT HARASSMENT OF THE
COMMUNIST STATES IN THE AREA. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT
THE US MILITARY, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL
ROLE HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY RECONCILED TO THE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES
WHICH PREVAIL IN THE REGION. NO DOMINOES HAVE DROPPED AND MANY
TYOIGHTFUL OBSERVERS APPEAR CONFIDENT THAT HANOI WILL BE

PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS INTERNAL PROBLEMS AND WILL NOT SEEK IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY TO CHANGE THE PRESENT STATUS QUO. NEVERTHELESS, THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN PROBLEM APPEAR TO ME TO REMAIN VERY MUCH THE SAME AS THEY HAVE BEEN IN RECENT YEARS AND IT IS NOT DIFFICULT TO FORESEE THE DILEMMAS WHICH AMERICAN POLICY MAKERS MAY HAVE TO FACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

2. WHILE POSSIBLY LESS SIGNIFICANT THAN OUR INTERESTS IN NORTH ASIA, US ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL TIES TO SOUTHEAST ASIA REMAIN CONSIDERABLE AND THE DESTABILIZING EFFECT ON JAPAN, AND THROUGH JAPAN ON US, OF AN EROSION OF THE WESTERN POSITION IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE. THESE COUNTRIES ARE PART OF OUR WORLD AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING IS NOT INSIGNIFICANT. THE AMERICAN DILEMMA IN PAST YEARS HAS BEEN WHETHER TO SEEK TO INFLUENCE EVENTS OUT HERE OR WHETHER TO SIT TIGHT AS INTERESTED OBSERVERS. WE CHOSE THE FIRST COURSE AND FAILED. NOW AS WE WATCH DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, WE SHOULD DO SO IN CLOSE CONCERT WITH JAPAN, WHOSE NATIONAL INTERESTS MAY WELL EXCEED OUR OWN. FOR THE TIME BEING, OUR PRESENT POSTURE IS CORRECT, BUT NEW PROBLEMS AND NEW CHOICES MAY WELL ARISE.

3. OF COURSE, THE FACT THAT NONE OF THE MAJOR POWERS CAN DOMINATE THE AREA AND THE FACT THAT EACH HAS A STAKE IN LIMITING THE INFLUENCE OF THE OTHERS CLEARLY
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ESTABLISHES A DEGREE OF TRIANGULAR STABILITY, BUT THE QUESTION MARK WHICH THROWS A LONG SHADOW OVER SOUTHEAST ASIA AND PARTICULARLY OVER THAILAND TODAY IS UNCERTAINTY WITH REGARD TO HANOI'S MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES.

4. AT THE RISK OF REPEATING WHAT WE HAVE SAID MANY TIMES, THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTIC WHICH UNDERLIES THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE STATES IN THIS AREA IS A PROFMUND PARANOIA. THIS LEADS THE THAI TO LIVE IN NERVOUS ANTICIPATION OF THE DARK DEEDS THE LAO, CAMBODIANS AND VIETNAMESE ARE PLOTTING AND, IN TURN, LEADS THE COMMUNIST STATES TO TAKE MEASURES AGAINST THE SKULLDUGGERY IN WHICH THEY BELIEVE THE AMERICAN IMPERIALISTS AND THEIR TAHI LACKEYS ARE ENGAGED. THIS PARANOIA HAS BEEN PALPABLY AGGRAVATED SINCE THE THAI COUP OF OCT 6, 1976. WHILE IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO TELL HOW MUCH THE COMMUNISTS BELIEVE

OF THE PROPAGANDA THEY SPEW OUT, I AM INCLINED TO THINK THAT THEY REALLY BELIEVE THAT WE ORGANIZED THE COUP AND ARE PLANNING, WITH THE HELP OF THE THAI MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, TO REESTABLISH AN AMERICAN PRESENCE IN THIS AREA. THIS MAY SEEM ABSURD TO US BUT THEY REPEAT THE CHARGE AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN. IF THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE IT WHEN THEY STARTED TO SAY IT, THEY WILL CERTAINLY BELIEVE IT SOON. WITHIN ROUGHLY THE SAME TIME FRAME, THE LAO RESISTANCE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN INCRASINGLY ACTIVE AND THIS PHENOMENON IS CLEARLY VIEWED BY THE COMMUNISTS AS A MANIFESTATION OF THAI-AMERICAN HOSTILITY. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT TENSIONS HAVE RISEN SIGNIFICANTLY IN RECENT MONTHS AND THAT THERE ARE NO PROBABLE EVENTUALITIES WHICH ARE LIKELY TO REVERSE THIS TREND. WHILE THE THAI PROFESS A DESIRE FOR GOOD RELATIONS WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS AND HAVE TAKEN DISCREET STEPS WITH
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HANOI TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS, THE GENERAL THRUST OF THEIR RHETORIC AND THE ACTIONS THEY HAVE TAKEN AGAINST RADICAL ELEMENTS HAVE OBVIOUSLY NOT BEEN REASSURING TO HANOI AND VIENTIANE. IT IS NOT YET TIME TO SOUND THE TOCSIN, BUT THE INCREASING FREQUENCY AND SERIOUSNESS OF BORDER INCIDENTS, THE REINFORCEMENT BY HANOI OF ITS FORCES IN LAOS, AND THE STEADY BUT UNSPEC-TULAR GROWTH IN THE SCOPE AND LEVEL OF VIOLENCE OF THE SEVERAL INSURGENCIES DO NOT AUGUR WELL FOR FUTURE TRANQUILITY.

5. IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT I AGREE WITH MY COLLEAGUES THAT WE SHOULD PROCEED CALMLY WITH STEPS WHICH MAY LEAD TO THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH HANOI, BUT, AS IT ALWAYS HAS, HANOI WILL SURELY PURSUE A TWO TRACK POLICY OF APPARENT RECONCILIATION AND OF PERSISTENT STRIVING FOR ITS REVOLUTIONARY GOALS. CONCURRENTLY, HANOI WILL BELIEVE THAT WE ARE PURSUING A SIMILAR POLICY OF DIPLOMATIC PALAVER ON ONE LEVEL AND STEALTHY HOSTILITY ON ANOTHER. WHILE WE ARE AS PURE AS CAESAR'S WIFE WHEN IT COMES TO SABOTAGE AND SECRET OPERATIONS IN THIS REGION, PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNIST SUSPICION ARE SUCH THAT THEY WILL NEVER BELIEVE IT.

6. THE THAI CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE MORE EMBATTLED THAN EVER BEFORE. THEY HAVE HAD A RINGSIDE SEAT FROM WHICH TO OBSERVE THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOCIETIES WE SUPPORTED. THEY HAVE UNDERSTOOD VERY CLEARLY THAT WE ARE NOT GOING TO COME MARCHING TO THEIR RESCUE. THEY NOD POLITELY WHEN WE SPEAK OF MAINTAINING OUR COMMITMSNTS AND, LIKE THEIR ASEAN NEIGHBORS, THEY

HAVE TALKED THEMSELVES INTO A MOOD OF SERIOUS QUESTIONING
OF US INTERESTS IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD. THEY SUSPECT THAT
WE MAY BE DISILLUSIONED WITH OLD FRIENDS AND OVERLY EAGER
TO ACHIEVE RECONCILIATION WITH THE VIETNAMESE. A US
DECISION TO LEAVS THE PHILIPPINES AND ABANDON OUR BASES
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THERE WITHOUT A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE TAKEN IN THAILAND AS
PROFF POSITIVE THAT WE WERE IN FACT COMPLETING OUR WITHDRAWAL
FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA.

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ES-01 ONY-00 /008 W
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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 3459

STADIS//////////

LIMDIS

FOR EA ONLY

7. I HAVE READ WITH INTEREST THE PERSUASIVE CASE
WHICH CAN BE MADE AGAINST KEEPING SUBIC AND CLARK,
PARTICULARLY CLARK, AND I DO NOT INTEND TO ENTER THE

DEBATE EXCEPT TO SAY ONCE AGAIN THAT EVERY COUNTRY IN
SOUTNEAST ASIA KEEPS TELLING US THAT IT WANTS US TO
REMAIN MILITARILY INVOLVED IN THE AREA -- BUT NOT ON
ITS SOIL. GIVEN THE PRESENT MOOD OF THE THAI LEADERS
AND THEIR LINGERING HOPE OF ASSOCIATING US WITH THEIR
FUTURE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, A DECISION TO MOVE OUT
OF THE PHILIPPINES WILL BE PROFOUNDLY DESTABILIZING
HERE. I WILL GO SO FAR AS TO POSTULATE THAT WERE
THIS TO HAPPEN THE THAI MIGHT, UNDER CERTAIN
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CIRCUMSTANCES, EXPRESS THEIR WILLINGNESS FOR US TO
RETURN TO UTAPAO. THIS MAY SEEM FAR-FETCHED TODAY,
BUT IT IS LONELY IN THIS THAI SALIENT ON THE MAIN-
LAND OF ASIA AND IF YOU ASSUME, AS DO MANY THAI,
THAT THE HOSTILITY OF YOUR NEIGHBORS IS IMPLACABLE,
YOU STOP WORRYING ABOUT WHAT THEY WILL THINK OR SAY.
THE THAI ARE CLEARLY MOVING IN THAT DIRECTION AND
IF YOU LOOK AT WHAT HANOI, VIENTIANE AND THE VOICE
OF THE PEOPLE OF THAILAND ARE SAYING, IT IS HARD TO
ASSERT CONCLUSIVELY THAT THEY ARE WRONG.

8. THE DIPLOMATIC UNDERPINNINGS OF U.S. THAI RELATIONS
ARE THE MANILA TREATY OF 1954 AND THE RUSK-THANAT
JOINT STATEMENT OF 1962. BOTH ARE BEING MORE FRE-
QUENTLY ALLUDED TO IN THAILAND.

A. ARTICLE IV OF THE MANILA TREATY STATES THAT
AN ARMED ATTACK IN THE TREATY AREA AGAINST ANY OF THE
PARTIES WOULD ENDANGER THE PEACE AND SAFETY OF EACH
OF THE PARTIES, WHICH WOULD ACT TO MEET THE COMMON
DANGER IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS.

(1) IF, FOR EXAMPLE, THAILAND IS THE VICTIM
OF AN ARMED ATTACK COMING FROM LAOS, ONLY THINLY
DISGUISED AS AN INSURGENCY, ARTICLE IV MUST BE READ
AS REQUIRING US TO CONSIDER COMING TO THE ASSISTANCE
OF THAILAND AND POSSIBLE BECOMING INVOLVED IN ANOTHER
QUASI-INSURGENCY.

(2) IF ARTICLE IV RESULTS IN NO ACTION BY
THE UNITED STATES, THE DISILLUSIONMENT IN THAILAND,
WHEN AMERICAN INACTION BECOMES APPARENT, WILL BE
VERY GREAT, AND U.S. CREDIBILITY WILL BE FURTHER
DAMAGED.

B. THE RUSK-THANAT JOINT STATEMENT HAS SECRETARY
RUSK REAFFIRMING, "THAT THE UNITED STATES REGARDS THE
PRESERVATION OF THE INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY OF
THAILAND AS VITAL TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST OF THE
UNITED STATES AND TO WORLD PEACE."

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C. POSITIVE ACTION BY THE U.S. TO LIQUIDATE THE MANILA TREATY AND THE RUSK-THANAT JOINT STATEMENT COULD CREATE SERIOUS PROBLEMS AND GIVE MISTAKEN SIGNALS TO BOTH FRIENDS AND ENEMIES. THEY ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE WHEN ALL IS QUIET AND ARE THE RELICS OF AN EARLIER ERA, BUT IF THE STORM CLOUDS GATHER, THEY WILL BE AT THE HEART OF OUR DILEMMA.

9. THAILAND IS NOT LAOS, CAMBODIA OR SOUTH VIETNAM AND NONE OF THE FOREGOING SHOULD BE CONSTRUED TO MEAN THAT WE THINK IT IS ABOUT TO GO DOWN THE DRAIN. OUR INTELLIGENCE SHOWS THE COMMUNIST INSURGENTS TO BE A BIT MORE NUMERIOUS AND BIT MORE ACTIVE, BUT, DESPITE THE TRADITIONAL CORRUPTION, INDOLENCE AND FAVORITISM WHICH SURROUND MUCH THAI GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITY, THERE ARE MANY ASPECTS OF THIS SOCIETY: THE ROYAL FAMILY, THE NATION-WIDE VILLAGE SCOUT MOVEMENT, AND THE RELATIVELY PROSPEROUS ECONOMY AMONG OTHERS, WHICH GIVE THIS DOMINO A GOOD DEAL OF STABILITY. OUR PROBLEM IS GOING TO ARISE FROM THE FACT THAT THE TENDENCY IN THIS SOCIETY AS BOTH INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL PRESSURES INCREASE WILL BE TO TRY TO MOVE CLOSER TO THE U.S. AS WELL AS TO ITS ASEAN NEIGHBORS. WE ARE NOT AT THIS POINT WHERE WE HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER TO ACCEPT THE EMBRACE OR WRIGGLE AWAY, BUT THAT MOMENT WILL COME AND WHEN IT DOES OUR DECISION TO ACT HELPFULLY TOWARD THAILAND OR TO TURN AWAY WILL HAVE CONSIDERABLE EFFECT ELSEWHERE.
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